

## BEYOND PROJECT 50

By Jed Schipper, M.S.W., LA County Department of Mental Health



*"Ollie Voss signing new lease with San Pedro Section 8 property owner."*

Los Angeles County's Project 50 (P50) is a multi-agency integrated team supervised by LACDMH psychologist Brian Betz. In 2008, fifty of Skid Row's most vulnerable homeless people were contacted by County outreach workers and moved immediately into housing. This was a pilot project, testing both the "housing first" model and the logistics of numerous County agencies (primarily John Wesley Community Health (JWCH), Skid Row Housing Trust (CSRHT), Didi Hirsch, Public Health and LACDMH working together as one team.

Project 50 has been hugely rewarding for both the recipients of permanent supportive housing services and the staff who provide daily support. However, one drawback to Project 50 has been that clients are effectively stuck in Skid Row because their Shelter Plus Care (SPC) subsidies are not portable. Many clients who live in SRHT's Charles Cobb Apartment are torn between their gratitude for subsidized housing and their inability to get away from the chaos of Skid Row.

Fortunately, SRHT and the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) have recently offered Project 50 clients a way out of Skid Row via the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP). The HCVP issues portable Section 8 vouchers to clients who have lived in a SRHT unit for more than two years and are in good standing.

Last month, a P50 client transitioned from his Skid Row apartment to an HCVP Section 8 apartment overlooking the ocean. He went from a view of 5<sup>th</sup> and San Pedro streets in Skid Row to a beautiful view of the Port of Los Angeles in the city of San Pedro. He had been living in Skid Row for more than 20 years, housed for five of those years, thanks to Project 50's outreach workers and ongoing integrated supportive services.

The client's new apartment is quiet and clean, and he's happy to have moved away from downtown. The client's new landlord is a resource I developed back when I was a LACDMH housing specialist years ago. The client is already connected for services at San Pedro Mental Health Clinic (SPMHC), thanks to supervising social worker Belen Williams, L.C.S.W., who met with the client and me on short notice and scheduled him for an intake the following week. Mrs. Williams is now coordinating services with his former Project 50 therapist, Erica Tumbaga, L.C.S.W. (JWCH), who has been providing therapy with the client for years. The client's psychiatrist of five years, Dr. Wendy Roberts (JWCH), will soon be in touch with his SPMHC psychiatrist for additional service coordination.

Two other clients have also moved out of the Cobb recently via their HCVP Section 8 vouchers, and two others are in the process of negotiating leases. Two of the clients will live close to their families whom they were separated from during years of homelessness. Skid Row Housing Trust service coordinators are working closely with HACLA to ensure smooth transitions to the new apartments. This is very exciting news for all of us here at Project 50. We are thankful to the agencies supporting P50, current and former P50 staff, and people like LA County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and *Los Angeles Times* writer Steve Lopez who have publicly supported this model for the past seven years.